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SUBJECT: PROGRESS REPORT ON ELECTORAL COMMISSION'S TIMELINE

REF: KINSHASA 218

1. (SBU) Summary. Immediately following the February 2-4 Inter-Institutional Seminar, the DRC's Independent Electoral Commission published an electoral timeline highlighting the need to provide the CEI with increased office and storage space, and to begin identifying voting registration centers by the end of February. The CEI's goal is to pressure the GDRC into action by assigning specific tasks and dates. The results thus far have been mixed as the GDRC is moving more slowly than hoped. End Summary.

2. (U) Following the "Inter-Institutional Seminar" held in Kinshasa February 2-4 (reftel) the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) issued a press statement that included a timeline of tasks to be undertaken by various government entities. This timeline called on the GDRC to make office space for the CEI available throughout the country to permit the deployment of electoral workers, and begin identifying an estimated 9,000 voter registration centers. The CEI stated that it would work urgently to accomplish these tasks by the end of February 2005. Other tasks, including the adoption of a constitutional law by parliament and debate on GDRC funding for elections, are projected for the month of March and will be covered septel.

Some Progress Increasing CEI's Access to Office Space

3. (SBU) Poloff met the Chief of Cabinet to the CEI's President, Flavien Misoni, on February 23 to discuss the status of these tasks. The CEI is currently discussing with the GDRC use of the National Congolese Radio and Television (RTNC) office tower in Kinshasa as the site for its national headquarters. This tower has been in disrepair for a number of years and needs work, especially with the elevators. According to Misoni, European Union and UNDP officials are currently evaluating the costs of repairs. Despite the fact that the building is also occupied by Special Presidential Security Guards (GSSP), Misoni feels this is the best alternative available and thinks that the CEI can create a separate entrance to avoid contact with the GSSP. Misoni said the GDRC is also making available a set of large government-owned warehouses in Kinshasa where the CEI can store voter registration and election materials. These buildings will also need some work and the removal of homeless people who have taken refuge there. Misoni said both the RTNC and the warehouses could be available within 4 weeks, i.e. the end of March. The CEI plans to move in and start using the buildings even as repair work is being conducted.

4. (U) The temporary building housing the CEI in Kinshasa has also been provided with many trailers that will be used by the UNDP unit working on the procurement of voter registration materials. Extensive work is being done to make the trailers operational within a matter of days. According to Misoni, the new location of UNDP officials will allow them to coordinate more efficiently with the CEI. UNDP envisions eventually co-locating its technical experts at the new CEI headquarters, together with those of the EU and other donors (such as those supported by USAID).

5. (U) Nationwide, the CEI has opened offices in the capitals of all 11 provinces and is currently in the process of searching for suitable buildings for the 64 remaining provincial liaison offices. According to Misoni, over 50% of these buildings have already been selected, but most of them need some refurbishing before they become operational. The President of the CEI has begun a direct information/communication campaign traveling to Bandundu the week of February 20.

Registration Centers Identified in Theory

6. (U) Misoni said the CEI, in collaboration with provincial authorities, has identified on paper most of the 9,000 voting registration centers needed. The next task will be to send officials to inspect these buildings, most of which are expected to be schools, hospitals, and other public facilities. Each of these centers is expected to serve approximately 3,111 voters (for a total of 28 million). According to Misoni, the CEI seeks to overcome the problem of

limited infrastructure by locating registration centers in locations where people already gather for religious, commercial, or cultural activities.

Comment

17. (SBU) The CEI's main motivation for assigning specific tasks and dates is to pressure GDRC institutions into action. CEI representatives have acknowledged that the dates are ambitious, but they characterize their timeline as a "flexible working document" meant to get all actors to take concrete action and to share responsibilities for organizing the elections. Ultimately, the CEI depends on the GDRC for access to office and storage space and for its operating budget. To the extent that the GDRC has already taken some specific actions to assist the CEI in this regard, the Commission's strategy appears to be working, albeit more slowly than hoped.

18. (U) Bujumbura minimized considered.
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